

Rowe Board of Selectmen Meeting
January 30, 2020
5:30 P.M.
Rowe Town Hall – Meeting Room 1

Board of Selectmen: Chair Charles Sokol, Vice-Chair Jennifer Morse
Absent: Selectman Ed Silva
Administrative Staff: Paul McLatchy III, Administrative Assistant to the Boards
Finance Committee*: Vice-Chair Loretta Dionne, Christopher “Selmi” Hyytinen, Paul McLatchy III, Laurie Pike, Wayne Zavotka (Participated Remotely)
Other Attendees: Fire Chief Dennis Annear, Park Commissioner Christopher “Selmi” Hyytinen, Highway Superintendent Lance Larned, Park Manager Sean Loomis, Town Clerk Paul McLatchy III, Park Commissioner Laurie Pike, Police Chief Julie Shippee
Audience of Citizens: Joanne Semanie

**During certain topics individuals stepped down as committee members and took on other roles, and are listed in those roles under “Other Attendees”*

Call to Order: Chair Sokol called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M., a quorum of the board present.

Recording Devices: One recording device was noted.

Communications: Vice-Chair Morse reported receiving a letter from resident Gail May on Potter Road, commending the work of the DPW on the dirt roads in town.

Davis Mine/Davenport Roads: Superintendent Larned was asked to attend the meeting to discuss issues with some of the dirt roads in town. Superintendent Larned has six signs that say “No thru traffic mud” that he can put at the head of each road. However, he noted Police Chief Shippee has concerns about putting up signs and whether this might encourage youth to intentionally go on the road. He would like the Board’s guidance on wording so he can order three signs for the Davis Mine/Davenport roads. After brief discussion, the Board seemed to settle on “Road closed at Rowe border local traffic only”. A smaller sign will be placed under these with citation information. Superintendent Larned will have to contact Charlemont to put the signs up near the outlet of the roads.

Prior to the meeting a suggestion had been made about laying down 1½” stone on the road to help mitigate the mud problem. However, Superintendent Larned and Vice-Chair Morse agreed that this could cause damage to cars and pop tires. The Board wants to see a plan in writing so that it’s clear what the actions will be when there is a thaw and the road turns to mud. This plan should include the product that is being used, the reason why that specific size is being used, etc. Superintendent Larned said that he has been speaking with Selectman Silva about the ideal way to fix the road, but any lasting repairs will have a large cost associated with it.

Yankee Road: Vice-Chair Morse and Administrative Assistant McLatchy spoke about the meeting they held with Representative Paul Mark on Monday regarding Yankee Road. Due to the spent fuel on the Yankee site and the high-hazard Sherman Dam, there is a level of urgency in finding a funding mechanism for road repair. Great River Hydro occasionally has to bring in a large crane to their site, which may require a temporary widening of the road until it’s repaired. Mr. McLatchy reached out to Lamson Engineer Kin Lam to ask for an

estimate of what it would cost to engineer a short-term expansion of the road. In the meantime, Representative Mark will be filing legislation as part of a transportation bill in February for funding of the road repairs. If that fails, he'll include it in the annual budget in April.

Comp Time Policy: Over the summer the Board of Selectmen and Superintendent Larned reached a tentative agreement on his comp time policy. His original salary supposedly included three hundred hours of overtime, but a signed copy of a hire letter or contract could not be located. Moving forward, it was agreed to that the first three hundred hours of overtime would not be paid, but anything above that would be accumulated as comp time. A draft addendum was submitted for signatures.

MOTION TO APPROVE: A motion was made by Chair Sokol to approve and sign the addendum to the Rowe Highway Superintendent job description, was seconded by Vice-Chair Morse, and passed unanimously (2-0-0) in favor.

Mr. Larned was thanked for attending and left the meeting at 5:51.

Wage Increase Option: Vice-Chair Morse reported that in another town she works in, instead of increasing workers' salaries/rates by a COLA percentage, they are instead raising it by \$0.75 per hour to keep pace with the minimum wage. This would positively impact the lower-paid workers while negatively impacting the higher-paid workers (who might receive more than \$0.75 from a COLA raise). However, Vice-Chair Morse did point out that a number of our higher-paid employees were among some of the best paid in the county, and this could be a way to keep that in check. She will look into what that will mean for the town if it was decided to use that instead of a COLA increase.

Life Insurance Options: The town is now partnering with American Fidelity to provide Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) to benefited employees. They will also be conducting a Section 125 review for the town, which is required by IRS code. In exchange for providing these services free of charge, American Fidelity must be allowed to offer their insurance products to employees as well. As the town already offers similar products through Boston Mutual, the town is left with three options:

1. Make no changes. Employees can choose which provider they'd like to enroll with.
2. Grandfather existing policies, but all new policies will be with American Fidelity.
3. Move all existing policies to American Fidelity and cut ties with Boston Mutual.

MOTION: A motion was made by Chair Sokol, seconded by Vice-Chair Morse, and passed unanimously in favor (2-0-0) to move all new policies to American Fidelity, but allow existing policies to be grandfathered.

Transit Authority Appointment: The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) has an open seat for a commuter appointment. A list is generated by the AFL-CIO of volunteers, and the annual appointing town rotates amongst the members. This year it is Rowe's turn to appoint. Only one individual expressed interest, and that person currently serves as the commuter representative.

MOTION TO APPOINT: A motion was made by Vice-Chair Morse, seconded by Chair Sokol, and passed unanimously in favor (2-0-0) to appoint Jasper Lapienski to the FRTA Board.

Early Voting: Administrative Assistant McLatchy asked the Board whether or not they would like voters to be able to early-vote during his regular daytime hours. He is only required to have early voting hours during his town clerk time, but thought that allowing it during the day as well might encourage people to vote. No vote was taken, but the Board agreed to allow individuals to come in for early voting during his administrative hours.

Davis Mine/Davenport Road, Revisited: Police Chief Shippee (who was not present during the earlier discussion) expressed her concerns about putting up signs. She suggested using existing signage, and/or possibly adding “travel at own risk”. The Board took her comments under advisement.

Mass Municipal Association (MMA) Conference: The Board asked Mr. McLatchy how the conference he attended went. He said that it went very well, though it consisted of three very long days. Over the two-day event, he attended nine workshops, attended receptions, listened to several speakers, and met a number of officials from other towns. While some of the workshops were not as helpful as he had hoped, many were interesting and relevant to the work of town hall. He recommended that next year Executive Secretary Janice Boudreau attend the conference as well, as there were a number of events that occurred at the same time, forcing him to choose.

Vadar Contracts: A Community Compact Technical Assistance IT grant was received for \$21,303. This will help pay for the transition costs to new accounting software with Vadar. The contract will be presented at next week’s meeting for approval and signing.

Fire Chief Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): The MOU that was presented by the Charlemont Select Board was sent to town counsel, who has since reviewed and made numerous changes. The Board reviewed the suggestions and agreed to incorporate them into the document. Several comments were made by the attorney, and the Board addressed them. Changes by the Board included removing reference specifically to Dennis Annear (and just stating a fire chief), generalizing vehicle repairs into one category (versus defining major vs. minor), and changing from a five-year vehicle lease to a three-year vehicle lease.

Public Safety Commission: Mr. Hyytinen suggested that a committee be appointed to advise and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen prior to the likely merger of emergency departments in the coming year. This may even include members of other towns. This would only be an advisory board, but could take a lot of the “leg work” away from the Selectmen. Vice-Chair Morse wanted to wait for Chief Annear’s thoughts.

Finance Committee: The Finance Committee called their meeting to order at 6:30, with a quorum present and Wayne Zavotka participating by remote participation.

Police Budget: Chief Shippee submitted two budgets- one with the approved 2.5% COLA increase, and the other representing an increase to twenty hours a week. There has been an uptick in operations mostly due to an increase in Tri-Tech costs, which covers computer software. They are also maintaining two cruisers rather than one.

A great deal of discussion ensued about the number of hours for Chief Shippee and the department as a whole. Currently the chief is budgeted based on eighteen hours a week, with two officers receiving twelve hours a week each. With an increase to twenty hours, this means that the town ranges between 42-44 hours a week in police coverage.

Mr. McLatchy asked if the town really needs 42-44 hours a week of coverage, when many surrounding towns make due with much less. Chief Shippee said that much of the time spent in the winter by officers is for home checks belonging to those that are away for the winter. During the summer, they check on homes of people who go away for vacation. When patrol is added in, this takes up approximately 75% of the weekly hours, leaving only 25% for radar, calls, and administrative tasks.

Concerning the increase in hours, members seemed in agreement that the position should be increased, as most of the benefits Chief Shippee would be eligible for are already covered by her husband, who works for the road crew. This would mostly allow her access to the regional retirement system, as well as paid vacation time. Therefore, the cost would be minimal beyond the increase in hours. However, Mr. McLatchy asked whether this would be setting a precedent for when Chief Shippee retires- will the next police chief be benefited as well? This could set the town up for an increase in costs down the road.

Chief Shippee reported that new radios will be needed in the future, though perhaps not this coming fiscal year. She will submit it as part of a capital request. The county is transitioning to a state-owned system. The state will cover the cost of the radios, but the town has to come up with funds for installation, accessories, etc. She is expecting to need four for officers and two for the cruisers, so approximately \$3,000 or so. However, it could still be a few years before this is implemented.

Lastly, a bill came in dated from last February, in FY2019. Mr. McLatchy will speak with the town accountant to see if there is a way to pay this without going to special town meeting.

Chief Shippee was thanked for attending the meeting, and left at 6:54.

Town Clerk Budget: Town Clerk McLatchy presented a budget that includes an increase of \$1,646. However, of that, \$1,600 is for an additional election. Ops went down and included shifting some money towards education. In addition, he asked for \$1,200 for an assistant town clerk stipend. He envisions appointing an assistant town clerk to work approximately five hours a month to have someone help during busy times, when the clerk is absent, and to provide basic training in the event of a long-term absence (i.e. injury/illness). This was paid for by reducing \$1,200 off of the existing clerk's stipend. Mr. Zavotka and Chair Sokol spoke to allowing for the \$1,200 stipend, but keeping the clerk's stipend at the FY20 level (rather than decreasing it). Vice-Chair Morse recommended an increase in operations, as there will be new printers going out with expensive toner cartridges.

Park Budget: Park Manager Sean Loomis presented the Park's budget, which is mostly level-funded. A great deal of discussion was held about whether or not the town should be paying minimum wage to the summer youth, especially with it going up 75 cents a year for the next three years. Members largely agreed that the town should pay minimum wage, even if not required to do so by law. Manager Loomis suggested looking at other towns to see how they pay their youth workers. The revolving fund seems to be bringing in a decent amount of revenue, and will be used to offset program costs.

The park is requesting three special projects this year. They are asking for \$4,200 for bathroom siding- this was never done since the bathrooms were built. They are requesting \$22,000 for a new play structure as the current one is deteriorating and has achieved its expected lifespan (approximately 25 years). Lastly, they are putting in for \$4,000 for beach sand, which they anticipate will be needed every few years to keep up with what they're losing. A grant may be sought for the play structure.

A larger discussion was held over the future of the tennis courts. They are currently in great disrepair, and would be about \$4,000 per year just to make annual repairs. Though they are not presenting anything at this time, they would like to look into a multi-use court (i.e. one tennis court and perhaps a basketball/pickleball court). A new court would likely run around \$130,000. Before they propose this for budgeting purposes, they are going to ask voters whether they would like a new court at all.

Park Manager Sean Loomis was thanked for attending, and left the meeting at 7:50.

Fire Department: Fire Chief Annear attended the meeting and presented his annual budget. He tried to provide as much detail as possible in the budget, for which he was thanked. The operations line largely remains the same. When discussing the hose testing, he noted that they have much more hose than is needed, and will be discarding old hosing as appropriate. However, there will be a need to replace it with new hosing in the next few years, which will be part of a capital project. Some energy efficiency measures will be looked at over the next year to try and cut heating costs.

A notable increase this year is a request for a part-time individual to work between 16-18 hours a week. Chief Annear says that there is enough work over there to keep someone busy for that much each week, and that this individual would be fire trained personnel, able to respond to fire and medical calls. Chair Sokol noted that this is a difficult hourly range, as it's too little to live off of, but difficult to take on on top of a regular full-time job. Chief Annear said he has someone in mind that is interested.

Chief Annear raised concerns about the existing response times of the North Adams ambulance, and that this person would be available more quickly to help manage the situation until the ambulance arrived. Between this person and the police department, this would allow for roughly sixty hours a week of medical coverage, which appealed to both the Board and the Finance Committee.

Chair Sokol inquired as to how the department has changed over the last three years that would justify an increase of roughly 66%. Chief Annear responded by saying that there have been major improvements in response, quality of equipment, training, etc.

Members of both boards discussed how volunteers are paid, and how they *should* be paid. Some towns have hourly rates, some have annual stipends, and some are completely volunteer. No suggestions were made to change this, as members agreed that it was unlikely that people would do this stressful work for free. Chief Annear explained that his goal is to implement a step system so that more educated and more experienced members will get paid more, versus the flat rate that everyone receives now regardless of their abilities.

Like the police department, the fire department will also need to replace radios in the near future once the county shifts to the state radio system. Chief Annear feels that if the town hall is going to be used as the Emergency Operations Center, a base unit will need to be installed. Due to the lack of existing infrastructure, this will cost around \$1,000. He is estimating that for the portable radios, the town will be looking at \$7,800-\$8,000 for new radios. Members discussed possibly appropriating this from free cash and having it roll over as a special project as the implementation schedule is still unknown.

Lastly, the Board and Finance Committee talked about future capital expenses. Both fire engines are fifteen years old, with recommendations by national standards not to exceed twenty-five years. Chief

Annear said that some cities buy new vehicles, some strictly buy used. It would depend on the financial state of the town at the time, and what the long-term goals are. In addition, the police and fire departments are looking at an addition to the building by expanding out onto the concrete pad in front. This would allow for a larger area for the police and give the fire chief an office of his own.

Chief Annear was thanked for his time, and both he and the Finance Committee left at 9:20.

Phone System: The phone system at town hall is down, with all calls being routed to Executive Secretary Boudreau's office. Voicemail systems are also down, which affects part-time offices. Executive Secretary Boudreau has been speaking with existing provider Avaya and Northeast IT about a replacement product. The new product would be an increase, but not by a lot as it could potentially replace multiple existing landlines.

MOTION TO ACCEPT: A motion was made by Chair Sokol, seconded by Vice-Chair Morse, and passed unanimously (2-0-0) to accept the Confidential Service Proposal for Intermedia Unite provided by Northeast IT Systems Inc. for a one-time cost of \$1,377.33 and a monthly charge of \$732.00.

Next Meeting: The Board will next meet on Thursday, February 6th to continue budget hearings with the Finance Committee and various departments.

Adjourn: With no further business to attend to:

MOTION TO ADJOURN: A motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:29 was made by Vice-Chair Morse, seconded by Chair Sokol, and passed unanimously (2-0-0) in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul McLatchy III

Administrative Assistant to the Boards

Approved on: 2/13/2020



Charles Sokol, Chairman



Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair

Attachments:

1. Agenda
2. Note from Gail May
3. Addendum to Job Description
4. Police Budget
5. Town Clerk Budget
6. Park Budget
7. Fire Department Budget
8. Note from Executive Secretary Boudreau re: phone systems
9. Phone Proposal by Northeast IT